

### Have we got a new Bishop yet?

Over the last month or so, many people have asked whether a new bishop has been appointed to East Anglia yet. Many people have assumed that as Bishop Michael's illness had been well-known for a long time, that the process of choosing his successor would have already been underway. It therefore comes as a surprise to them that such is not the case. Until a bishop dies or his resignation from office is accepted by the Holy See, the process cannot begin.

### So, what does happen?

When Bishop Michael died the Diocese became 'Sede Vacante' – literally a Vacant Seat! The bishop's cathedra in the Cathedral now has no occupant, and will not have until a new bishop is ordained and installed there. In the meantime however, the life of the Diocese has to continue. Responsibility for this falls on the College of Consultors – a group of priests who have acted as the Bishop's 'Cabinet'. In Bishop Michael's time the College has comprised his Vicars General, Vicar Judicial, Vicar for Finance, Chancellor and the Deans. These priests are obliged to meet immediately and elect one of their number as Diocesan Administrator. Fr David Bagstaff, Parish Priest of North Walsham, Dean of the North Norfolk Deanery and one of Bishop Michael's former Vicars General was elected. He immediately made his Profession of Faith as required by Canon Law and notified the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Mennini, the Pope's representative to Great Britain, of his election. His

appointment was subsequently confirmed in a Latin document from the Holy See. Fr David will administer the Diocese, with the help of the Consultors until a new bishop is appointed.



*Father David Bagstaff  
Diocesan Administrator*

It is at this point that the process of choosing a new bishop really begins. It is a process that can be quite lengthy as you may remember from the previous occasion we were without a bishop, when Bishop Peter Smith was translated to Cardiff in succession to Archbishop Ward. Then we waited for 15 months! However, the length of time, rather than being solely a cause of frustration, can also be seen as a reminder of the care that is taken to discern who would be the most suitable bishop for East Anglia – indeed, whom God is calling to that ministry.

### The Needs of the Diocese.

A number of people have assumed that it is already 'done and dusted'. 'There must be a list' and presumably the one who has arrived at the 'top of the list' is appointed. It is not so simple – and is infinitely more pastoral! Whilst it is clear that there must be some good and holy priests who have been identified as possible future bishops – it is the needs of the Diocese that are of primary importance in appointing a new bishop. As part of the process the Diocesan Administrator

draws up a report on the present state of the Diocese and of its most pressing needs. The consultation goes further than his report alone. The manner in which this is performed is not widely published quite simply to ensure that those who are consulted, laity and clergy alike, are not only a balanced cross-section of people involved in all levels of the life of the Diocese, but that they are able to express their thoughts honestly and without any pressure from others. We all know that 'lobbyists' of all kinds would home in on those being consulted if they knew who they were!



*Archbishop Antonio Mennini,  
the Apostolic Nuncio to Great  
Britain.*

We must bear in mind that the Church is not like other human institutions, although it may have many similar characteristics. When Fr David was elected as Diocesan Administrator it was important not simply that a majority decision was made, but that a consensus was reached. A majority decision can always run the danger of creating a faction of 'losers'. It would be difficult for anyone who has been chosen in such a manner to be a focus of unity – to keep together those who make up Christ's Body the Church. Even more so for a bishop who is to be a focus of unity for his Diocese. Thus the

process of consultation, which is now beginning, seeks not to identify a 'victorious party', but the choice of man who will answer the needs of our Diocese and who will lead us forward to address those needs together, united in one and the same Spirit.

The Diocese of course does not exist in isolation from other dioceses, and the bishops of the Province are also consulted. East Anglia is one of the suffragan dioceses of the Province of Westminster, so Archbishop Nichols and the other bishops of dioceses of Westminster, Northampton, Brentwood and Nottingham and possibly bishops from other provinces in England and Wales, will also be consulted.

#### **The Man.**

Once a profile of the needs of the Diocese has been arrived at, then those responsible are in a position to look for a man who best fulfills those needs. A man whose particular combination of gifts will enable the church in East Anglia to continue its present growth and look forward to a future that may be very different, but one that is also full of promise and hope. It is at this point that individuals begin to be considered for the post of the 4th Bishop of East Anglia. The Nuncio will then decide on a 'short list' of men who would be suitable candidates. An investigation will take place as to their suitability. These investigations once again take place in strictest confidence in order not to compromise any of the possible candidates. All may be eminently suitable, and the choice of one over the others does not reflect negatively upon them, especially in the light of what has been said above about

the precedence of the needs of the Diocese.

Finally he will draw up a 'terna' – a list of three names – which are submitted to the Congregation for Bishops in Rome along with all the documentation that he has collected and his own recommendation. The Congregation then examines the documentation carefully and is free to reject any or all three of the suggested candidates. In the latter case a new *terna* would have to be drawn up by the Nuncio. If however, the Congregation is happy with one of the candidates, his name will be submitted to the Pope who is free to accept the nomination or to refuse it. If he accepts, then the Nuncio contacts the priest who has been nominated to seek his consent. If that consent is forthcoming then a date is set for publication of the appointment. Only then, at the end of a long process of prayer, reflection and examination will we know who our new bishop will be.



*Pope Benedict XVI*

Whilst the process strives to provide a balance and wide consultation as a basis for the choice of our new bishop, comparatively few of us will be asked to provide a personal opinion on the needs of our Diocese. We must pray that those who are so asked will do so with integrity and wisdom – guided by the Holy Spirit. Still

fewer people will be asked to submit names – and only at the invitation of the Nuncio – so please don't flood his desk with letters! But we all have our part to play at this important moment in the life of the Diocese: ensuring that the work of living and preaching the Gospel continues as normal, and also in prayer for our Diocese, for those involved in choosing a successor to Bishop Michael and for the man whom God has chosen to be our next bishop.

**Eternal God, shepherd and guide,  
in your mercy give your Church in East Anglia  
a shepherd after your own heart  
who will watch over your people with loving care;  
a leader of vision  
and a teacher of your truth  
who will inspire young and old alike.  
So may your Church be built up,  
your Gospel heard,  
and your name be glorified.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**

**Our Lady of Walsingham – pray for us!  
St. Felix – pray for us!  
St. Edmund, King & Martyr – pray for us!  
St. Etheldreda – pray for us!**